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in which dried fish, raw meat, ghee butter and other foodstuffs are openly displayed. These goods are always black with flies and as one drives through the narrow streets of the shopping centre a black, buzzing cloud obscures the windscreen. In summer it is much worse. The Arabs are curiously indifferent to this plague of dirt, bad odour and insects, and will sit for hours outside the shops, idly gossiping, while flies settle on their beards and faces, fall into their Turkish tea, or get mixed up with their rice. It is almost impossible not to swallow flies when one is talking, and the only remedy when in these districts is to keep one's mouth tightly shut. I have seen Arab babies lying in the open air, their eyes swollen and festered from some disease and covered with flies. Trachoma and cataract are common troubles among the Arabs, and it is surprising that epidemics of typhoid and dysentery are not frequent.

The blame for this state of affairs cannot be laid on the Arab peasantry, who are illiterate, badly paid and poorly nourished. They have been brought up for centuries in primitive surroundings and have come to regard their way of life as natural and even congenial. It is curious that where the poorer class of Arab has come into close contact with the American or Englishman he has imitated, in a bizarre and comic fashion, the Western style of dress, but he has stopped short at the more important aspects of our civilization. Perhaps, in his present state of culture, the Arab has an ingrained scorn of sanitation and health. By disposition, and owing to the intense heat of the summer months, he is a lazy individual, judged by our standards, working only when he must or when the fancy takes him. But there are deeper reasons for the Arab's tolerance of dirt and disease. To say that his attitude is inborn, as some visitors to the Middle East are prone to do, is begging the question.

The Arab has some admirable virtues, not the least of which is his strong sense of hospitality and charity. The poor man seldom goes away empty-handed, and the visitor is always sure of a meal, a resting-place for the night, and coffee. If not always strictly truthful, the Arab is unfailingly polite and his courteous manners would often put a European to shame. He has outstanding courage, particularly in battle, and despises meanness and immorality. He is frugal, kindly unless his fierce pride and spirit of independence are upset, and intensely religious. Indeed, what impressed me most about the Arabs of all classes was their extreme devotion to the faith of the Prophet, and their realistic interpretation of the Koran, which means more to them in their daily lives than the Bible means

to the majority of professing Christians. If an easy acceptance of poor and insanitary living conditions is one of the major faults of this race, as I believe it is, then such a shortcoming is easily counterbalanced by their innumerable virtues, which are seldom found in practice amongst Englishmen.

I have not had the opportunity to make a deep study of social problems in Arabia, but from my interpretation of what I have seen, I should not hesitate to lay the blame for the vices and backwardness of Arab life on the system of government which obtains in most regions. In principle it is comparable with the feudal system in Europe. Apart from the Bedouin country, where life is migratory and the tribes are tent-dwellers, the majority of Arabs are concentrated in the fertile valleys, where they can obtain water for their livestock and crops. In Oman, as in other parts of the continent, the coastal areas are ruled by paramount sheikhs, whose power is absolute and who are sometimes elected by their subjects, but who are more generally appointed by succession, the kingdom thus remaining in the hands of one family. Although many of these princely families are quite ancient, and have provided rulers for different sheikhdoms for centuries, it is not unusual to find one sheikh deposing another by force. Jealousy and a greed for more territory and power are frequently the root cause of tribal wars.

There is little that is democratic in the government of a sheikhdom. Through his judges and ministers, who are paid out of the royal purse, the sheikh administers justice. Often it is the justice of a tyrant, although some sheikhs are just and kindly and are regarded by their subjects more as 'fathers of the people' than as kings. All land belongs to the sheikh, who is theoretically custodian for his tribe, and he exacts revenues from merchants, shopkeepers, fishermen, pearling-fleet owners and merchants, camel breeders and farmers, in the form of a commission on all business, in addition to heavy taxes on the inhabitants of the towns and villages. There are, too, taxes on land and property, on fishing and pearling rights, and profits are even obtained from the sale (illegal and contrary to the treaties with the British Government, but still indulged in) of slave labour.

Apart from the pearling industry, one of the richest sources of income in Arabia is from the date plantations, and these, if not actually owned by the sheikhs, at least provide him with a handsome additional income. In recent years the Arab rulers have been considerably enriched by large sums paid for concessions by the oil

ment of 'the hooks'. A thief condemned to this terrible sentence may well blench. He is dropped from a high wall or tower on to sharp hooks which project from the wall. With his limbs securely skewered, he is left hanging in the pitiless sun until the vultures end his misery, leaving a whitened skeleton as a warning to wantons. Influential prisoners are cast into the palace dungeons without light or food, and garrotted quietly in the night by their gaolers. Branding and flogging are also common forms of punishment in Arabia.

A fair amount of desert raiding is still carried on in the Jebel Shamailiyah district, the range of mountains between Oman and Muscat, and at Sinash, a lonely town in the hills, the *Wali*, or Sultan's Viceroy, has been obliged to use draconian means of dealing with brigands, who sometimes resort to ransom and are a menace to peaceful merchants who use the pass. Not long ago one of the Sultan's brothers was abducted and carried off into the hills. The ransom demanded—a heavy one—was paid, but a year later the ringleader and several of his men were caught by the Sultan's trackers. They suffered some unpleasant tortures before they were finally put out of their sufferings by being hanged. Their property was confiscated and their unfortunate relatives were obliged to pay several time the amount of the ransom. Crime does not pay in Arabia, unless you are on the winning side. Yet the bandit and the camel raider persist in their vocations in spite of all discouragement. The Arab is prepared to fight—to the death, if necessary, for that which he steals, and this is a spirit which all Arabs admire.

Young Arab boys and girls, as well as slaves and Persian servants, are sometimes carried off by the raiders, and at one time I was obliged to provide an armed guard for the Fort bearers, as they were terrified to return to Sharjah at night, a distance of one mile, unless accompanied. Haider, my personal bearer, a youth of fifteen, told me that he had once been attacked at night, and for a time I allowed him to sleep in one of the mess rooms. High prices are fetched in the slave market for young people, who are sold to merchants or pearling fleet owners and treated little better than negro slaves. A fifteen years old Persian boy may fetch as much as 2,000 rupees, and a girl about 1,500. Negroes fetch only half this amount. The British authorities are aware that a traffic in slaves is carried on in Oman, but claim that they have been unable to obtain any evidence of it. Since I have met slaves who complained to me that they had been abducted and sold in the market, and once

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CHAPTER XI

GENERALLY speaking, the Arab tribes of the Trucial Oman Coast are peace-loving people who are content to cultivate their date plantations, rear their herds of camels and goats, or spend two seasons of the year at the profitable pearl-fisheries. Tribal wars have become less frequent, and raids on villages are nearly always confined to the Bedouin and other nomadic tribes. Meeting an Arab in Sharjah or Dubai at the present day, it is hard to realize that his great-grandfather was in all probability a savage, ruthless pirate who plundered ships and murdered their crews without mercy. The ancestor of the present sheikh, and the forebears of most of his nobles were men of this calibre.

Piracy in the Persian Gulf has as ancient a history as pearl fishing and, like pearling, most of the able-bodied men of the coastal towns and villages were engaged in it. It was a safe and easy game in the days of the old sailing ships, when contrary winds would lure unsuspecting mariners to an uncharted reef, on which, perhaps, a light was showing. The Arab pirates, like the Cornishmen of old, were skilful wreckers. As soon as the ship grounded, scores of *bagrahs*, or rowing-boats, would set out from the shore, and from these the pirates would leap aboard; armed to the teeth and bent on murder, they rarely took prisoners, and would burn the ship before they left, thereby destroying evidence for a prowling frigate to discover. Yet, as one finds from a study of the interesting official documents on piracy which, still unpublished, lie in the archives of the Indian Government, fortune did not always favour the pirates.

It must be said in defence of the Trucial Coast tribes, that they are by nature peace-loving and friendly, and although among the seafaring classes piracy was a fairly common pastime for centuries (as it was amongst the English, French and Americans), it did not extend to the fishermen, pearl divers and townsmen until the end of the eighteenth century. The adoption of piracy by the latter classes was almost entirely due to the pressure and influence of the Wahabis, the fanatical sect which at that time over-ran Oman and

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228 477 came to Bahrain for the pearl season and remained there from the beginning of August until the end of October. She had some difficulty in establishing relations with the local dealers, who were prejudiced against carrying on business with a woman, but eventually she succeeded in buying pearls on the spot to the amount of 40,000 rupees (£3,000).

442 181 There is nothing to prevent anyone going to the Persian Gulf and buying pearls from the dealers, but there is very little likelihood that he will make a profit out of the transaction. The Arab is an extremely wily person and unless the greenhorn is lucky enough to obtain the friendly advice of an honest merchant, such as Hassan bin Ahmidfa he will, as likely as not, find himself saddled with rubbish. A life-study of pearls is necessary in order to be able to appraise their value, and even a Hatton Garden merchant who paid a visit to Bahrain or Sharjah would have to know something of the Arab character as well as of pearls. A woman singer who came to Sharjah with a concert party showed me a pearl necklace she had purchased in Bahrain; she told me she had paid £25 for it and seemed overjoyed with her 'bargain'. She lent the pearls to me to have them valued locally, and I showed them to Hassan. He eyed them with a look of contempt and handed them back.

'*Singabasi*,' he muttered, an Arabic word used to signify the bluish pearls of low value which have the silvery sheen of ball bearings. 'They are worth perhaps thirty rupees.'

dates, ground nuts, spices and ghee butter. One shop was devoted entirely to hubble-bubble pipes and we watched an old Arab carving a pipe stem. The stems, which are of bamboo, are fitted with a brass ring near the top to form a lip for the smoker, the body of the stem being delicately covered with gold and silver thread. The second stem, through which the air escapes, is of plain bamboo, engraved with Arabic designs which are carved with a red-hot knife, and then coloured with indigo. The bowl, made of unglazed pottery, has a slender neck flared at the top. These pipes cost about ten rupees each, the stems being a rupee extra.

Some of the shops are well stocked with canned goods and haberdashery from the Indian market, and one saw shelves full of sewing cotton, buttons, metal polish, brass lamps, and cheap cloth. A common sight is raw cotton, still in its pods, which is gathered from trees in the interior; untreated hemp and tobacco leaves, crudely dried. There were few carpets, and those we saw were of indifferent quality. A few of the merchants appeared to be well-off and one or two had robes of coloured silk, edged with gold thread. They had noble, intelligent faces, and one patriarch, with a snow-white beard and spotless linen *abbas*, looked out of place in that ill-assorted crowd. A large sapphire ring sparkled on his finger and his long, thin hands were those of an artist. One must be careful not to judge the Arab by Western standards, since dirt and insanitation are not abhorrent to them as they are to us. Even a cultured and fastidious Arab may have manners which would be out of place in a London drawing-room.

Apart from little girls up to ten years of age, we saw very few women, and they were heavily veiled. We walked to the little quay, which was clustered with dhows and rowing boats and watched the intense activity of shipbuilding and repairing that was in progress. The seams of the hulls are caulked with raw cotton and then covered with pitch, and the bottoms are painted with lime mixed with shark's oil, a good preservative. The upper part of the hull, above the water line, is also varnished with fish oil. Some of the sails are enormous and stretch from bows to stern, giving the dhows great speed on the water. This is necessary since they have to cover great distances, especially in the pearling season, when they may have to sail seventy miles in a single day to reach the beds.

There was quite a chilly breeze as we entered a ferryboat and were rowed across the creek, although the sun was still high above

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947, MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

travellers had declared did not exist in Oman. There was no road and the ground was hard and very bumpy, full of holes and nullahs. Tall grasses and shrubs grew in profusion, including *shinan* and the sea-green *harm* as well as some *Hadh* bushes, indicative of recent rain or heavy dews. The yellow flowers of the *zahr* blossomed in abundance, attracting myriads of insects, whilst several hares darted ahead of our truck and scurried away into their holes. The acacia (*samr*) trees grew in thin copses and were frequently fifteen feet high, which is unusual in this part of the desert.

When we had traversed five miles of this wooded country without so much as a trace of human life, our guides became nervous and begged to be allowed to return to Djaidh. We let them go, giving them a handful of biscuits and some tobacco as a gift, but before they left us they pointed to a site some two miles ahead where, they said, the *Badu* had last encamped. When we came upon this site we did, indeed, find the remains of a camp, the grass being lighter in patches than the surrounding herbage, whilst nearby was an old well and the dead embers of a fire. But of the *Badu* there was no sign.

We sat on a hillock for a few minutes, drinking tea, while Tandy and Williamson made a survey of the land; there were no tracks to guide us and nothing to indicate where the *Badu* might have concealed themselves. Sheikh Hamid, an amusing raconteur, recounted tales of the Beni Quitab tribe. These nomads number several thousand and, split into various sections, they roam all over the Oman country; branches of this tribe are to be found in the Nejd and Kuwait, but these have separate sheikhs and do not owe allegiance to Mohammed bin Ali. They are a wild, simple people, despising both the town dwellers and those who work with their hands. They live on dates, which they mostly steal, camels' milk, fish and rice. Some of these commodities they are obliged to buy, and the money for this purpose they obtain by selling camels, animal skins, including wolves, lizard and ibex; donkeys, wild honey, cheese and gazelle meat.

The Beni Quitab are famous camel breeders and during our trip across the *Marbakh* we saw large herds of these animals with their calves. They also breed donkeys, capturing the wild asses when young, and gather wild honey from the plains. Although they do as little work as possible, they cultivate small patches of ground to which they return twice a year, growing millet and tobacco, which they smoke in tiny pipes with cane stems.

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ladies' lingerie, but he has little use for some of the strange products of the West. For the townsman, who is living in a mixed community of Arabs from many parts of the Persian Gulf, Persians and Indians, it is a different proposition, and his materialism has made Dibai a small British export area, though mostly for the less refined goods that are unable to find buyers on a more discriminating market.

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The primitive bedouins who live by the foothills of the main mountain range, who owe allegiance to no one, are a constant cause of worry to the sheikhs, from whom they extract levies in return for protection; if the money is not forthcoming they raid the villages and carry off goods, camels and children. On the whole, however, the people of the coast seem to have a peaceful enough existence, making their living by, among other things, pearling, fishing and boat-building.

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At several points along the coast the wells are some distance inland, and water has to be transported to the villages by camel or donkey. Though brackish and unpalatable, it is expensive; the cost of buying water is a burden on the poor, and they take only sufficient for their minimum needs. Even so, the water-pot is always at hand when a traveller passes by — a simple hospitality that is often very touching. The lot of the dogs, a wretched one at the best of times in the

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